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NOTES AND COMMENTS.

I.

THE REWARDS OF LITERATURE.

IF THE journalists of the United States care to advance the cause of the Copyright League, they can assist it somewhat by simply discontinuing a piece of foolishness that has already run too long. The literary guild, like all others, contains a certain number of simpletons and fibsters. Every now and again some one of these, or some superserviceable friend of another, sets afloat a paragraph representing that for his last piece of literary work he has been paid the price of a farm or two. Large figures are always attractive, and half the journalists of the country copy these pleasant little items without testing or questioning them. I know of one writer who excites the derision of the initiated by always using the same phraseology when he originates one of these interesting bits of information about himself. His formula is this: "The largest price ever paid for a single magazine article, \$—, was paid to —, for his paper in the current number of —." Sometimes he fills the first blank with 1,000, and sometimes with 2,000; but everybody in the business knows that he could not get, at the utmost, more than \$100 for any article that he could produce. A few years ago I heard a woman of moderate, but respectable, literary reputation introduced to an audience as "the author of nine hundred stories published in *Harper's Magazine*." The lady thereupon rose gracefully and began her lecture, without contradicting or correcting the extraordinary statement as to the fertility of her pen; and the audience appeared to think it was all right, though a slight calculation would have exposed its monstrous impossibility. *Harper's Magazine* was founded only forty years ago, and to publish nine hundred of this lady's stories it would have to insert one in every number for seventy-five years. I once received a letter from a dabbler in literature in which he solemnly declared that he had been paid for his magazine articles at rates ranging from \$40 to \$70 per thousand words; whereupon I addressed an inquiry to half a dozen magazine editors, and learned, as I had expected, that he would be fortunate if he found a market for his productions at \$10 per thousand.

The latest instance of this mathematical romancing that I have seen is a paragraph in a recent number of *The Writer*, a bright and generally well-edited periodical, which ought not to make any serious mistake on those subjects to which it is specially devoted, yet which publishes this: "Mr.—has just sold the right to publish his new novel,—, to the — Publishing Company, for \$10,000, the largest sum paid for any recent work of fiction." The editor of *The Writer* ought to know that one may flatly contradict and disprove such a statement without consulting either the author or the publisher of the book. A royalty of 10 per cent. of the retail price is the basis of all contracts between publisher and author, and the terms seldom vary much from that figure. If a publisher buys outright the manuscript of a book, he fixes the price at something less than the amount he thinks it would probably earn for the author if published on a royalty. The author mentioned in the paragraph just quoted is a bright and racy newspaper contributor, but is not known as a novelist. Let us suppose that the publisher, for some powerful reason, is willing to pay him double royalty. His novel in the present state of the book trade must be issued in paper covers, at a price not greater than fifty cents. This paragraph, then, affirms that a publishing house has been discovered which will pay in advance double royalty on an assumed sale of 100,000 copies (or the usual royalty on 200,000) for a novel by a writer who has no reputation as a novelist! The works of light literature written in the United

States that have attained a sale of 100,000 copies do not exceed seven, and the novel in question will do remarkably well if it has one-tenth of that circulation.

There is a widespread belief among people of average intelligence and information that to write a single successful book is to make an independent fortune; and the publication of these silly paragraphs leads to the production of innumerable worthless stories, which enormously increase the labors of editors who read manuscripts, and return only bitter disappointment to the writers. Furthermore, just at this time there is danger that Congressmen, reading what handsome sums are paid to authors and believing the statements to be true, will think it a justification for voting against any international copyright law. The author of a good book ought to be handsomely rewarded, and we all heartily wish that such prices as have been mentioned could be obtained; but those who are in the business know perfectly well that such prices are not paid, and could not be; and if American journals will simply cease to copy these boastful paragraphs, they will confer a benefit upon every honest literary worker.

ROSSITER JOHNSON.

II.

CAN GOLD BE MANUFACTURED?

"WITH the gods and the chemists all things are possible," said the illustrious chemist, Hofmann. Nor does the statement seem much overdrawn when one considers the stupendous results obtained during the last quarter of a century by chemical investigators. The extraordinary researches of Newlands, Mendelejeff, and Meyer have shown that the atomic weights of the chemical elements, of which all matter is composed, occupy definite and unchangeable positions in a geometric figure, and that the properties of matter may be considered as mathematical functions of numbers. These discoveries throw open for investigation a territory that contains treasures beyond the power of the imagination to describe. Welsbach, following these investigators, split up the metal didymium into two other elements, proving—what had long been suspected by chemists—that some of the heavy metals could be resolved into simpler elements had we the requisite forces wherewith to break them up; and, as the conclusive demonstration of his discovery, he then reunited the new elements, phræsoodymium and nemodymium, and gave us back the compound substance, didymium. Crookes published a series of brilliant experiments on the metal yttrium, similarly breaking up this element into a number of substances, which he united again to reproduce the original yttrium. Last comes Gruenwald, who infers from spectroscopic investigations that all our elements can be reduced to but two primal forms of matter.

Now that this field has been opened to investigation, there can be no limit assigned to the discoveries that may follow. The forces at our control are growing daily more powerful and more manageable. Victor Meyer has been able to heat iodine until it exists in its atomic condition. What the next condition will be no one can tell.

These facts, and many others that could be given, make it probable that the so-called chemical elements are not really elements, but compounds, which in time we shall be able to separate into their constituents, and, conversely, to reproduce by combining other substances.

Among the heavy elements—and hence those that would be expected to yield to the searching attacks of the chemist—is gold. It is not improbable that in time it will become possible to make gold in large quantities—an event which would throw it out of use as a standard of value, so far as it derives its own value from its rarity. The consideration of such an event falls under two heads:

First, the value to the arts of cheap gold.

Second, the effect on civilization of making gold a common metal.

The first consideration is an obvious one. Gold would be very useful in the arts, for it is not corroded and it forms many excellent alloys. If it could be obtained in large quantities, it would probably, in a short time, aid in the production of articles that would be of far greater use to civilization than all of the available gold now is in its character as a standard of value.